

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA  
San Diego, California***

***United States Attorney  
Carol C. Lam***

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***For Further Information, Contact: Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph S. Smith (619)557-5669***

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***For Immediate Release***

## **LARGE MARITIME COCAINE SEIZURE**

### **NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY** - March 23, 2004

United States Attorney Carol C. Lam announced the filing of a complaint charging eight individuals with conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine onboard the GRICHI, a Panama-flagged fishing vessel. The United States Coast Guard seized approximately four tons of cocaine on the high seas and detained eight individuals on March 11, 2004, and has since transported the crew of the GRICHI to San Diego for prosecution. The estimated street value of the cocaine seized is more than \$100 million.

On March 11, 2004, the GRICHI was sighted by the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter (USCGC) Midgett, approximately 240 nautical miles southwest of the Galapagos Islands. The USCGC Midgett intercepted the GRICHI and boarded the vessel to conduct a search. This search resulted in the discovery and seizure of approximately four tons of cocaine which were contained in a fish hold aboard the ship.

United States Attorney Lam said, "By turning our efforts to seizing large drug shipments on the high seas, we intercept the drugs before they enter our borders." In September 2000, a federal maritime task force

in San Diego was created to process, investigate and prosecute maritime cocaine cases. Task force officers from the Drug Enforcement Administration, United States Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Federal Bureau of Investigation and United States Coast Guard make up the task force and are involved in follow-up investigation in this case.

According to United States Attorney Lam, the Government of Panama has authorized the United States to arrest and prosecute the crew members of the GRICHI under United States laws. With Panamanian authorization, the Coast Guard seized the contraband from the vessel and sailed through international waters into San Diego Harbor. A complaint charging the crew members was filed earlier today in federal court.

### **DEFENDANTS**

Arturo Diaz-Landa  
Robespierri Evercio Rodriguez-Morante  
Manuel Roque-Barrera  
Gary Uribe-Chavez  
Jaime Solano-Gamara  
Joaquin Celestion Quinonez-Otiniano  
Tomas Noel Parana-Aquile  
Juan Jose Ruiz-Tavera

### **SUMMARY OF CHARGES**

Number of defendants:       Eight

Number of counts:           One

46 App., United States Code, Section 1903 (a), (c)(1)(A), (c)(1)(C), (f) and (j) - Conspiracy to Possess with intent to distribute controlled substances on board vessels.

Violation and maximum penalties: a minimum mandatory 10 years up to life imprisonment; a \$4,000,000 fine; and, 5 years of supervised release.

### **LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES**

United States Coast Guard (USCG)  
Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)  
U.S. Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)  
Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

**A complaint itself is not evidence that the defendants committed the crimes charged. The defendants are presumed innocent until the Government meets its burden in court of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.**